
Warmest Spring On Record Adds To Drought Worries

By: NOAA Weather, Deseret News and USDA-NAAS

The spring season (March-May) of 2000 as well as the year-to-date (January-May) was the warmest on record for the United States, according to statistics calculated by National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) scientists.

The extremely warm temperatures contributed to worsening drought conditions in many areas of the country. Parts of the Southeast, Midwest, and Southwest continue to experience severe to extreme drought, causing crop damage and creating the need for water rationing in many areas. Twelve states averaged drier than normal for the spring season. Florida reported its fourth driest spring on record while Missouri had its eighth driest spring since 1895.

Utah's drier than normal weather is particularly affecting the southern part of the state, although the entire state is experiencing problems, according to Bill Alder, the meteorologist in charge of the Salt Lake office of the National Weather Service. "We haven't had much precipitation in a while. The south is the driest area, but the north isn't much better," Alder said. Also, farmers who rely on natural streams are going to face some hardships this season, primarily because the winter was so dry and the snowpack so "meager." "The stream flows are well below normal," Alder said. "There is enough water for most people (in agriculture), but those farmers who rely on the natural stream flow for water will be a little bit on the short side."

Dry conditions are helpful for harvesting hay, but soils are drying fast. Crops are consistently ahead of past years throughout the state. Irrigation water supplies in some localities are very short or are completely out of water. Some summer ranges are so dry that farmers are looking for alternate places to put their cattle.

PUBLIC MEETING NOTICE

Utah Prepares to Go Organic

The creation of State regulations governing organic agriculture is nearing completion. The Utah Department of Agriculture and Food (UDAF) is inviting comment from the public and the organic agriculture industry during a meeting June 30. The meeting will help finalize standards that will govern organic farming and ranching in Utah. The meeting is set for 1:30 p.m. in the UDAF Building main conference room, at 350 N. Redwood Rd, Salt Lake City, Utah.

Under the proposed rules organic crop and livestock producers wishing to label their products "organic" must comply with strict regulations. Many of these regulations are taken from guidelines already established by the Organic Trade Association, which is a national association representing the organic industry in Canada, the United States and Mexico. Utah's standards are nearly identical to those currently under review by the USDA.

The 48-page document specifies many conditions under which producers may attach the term "organic" to their products. For example, land intended for organic production must "...have had no prohibited substances, as listed in this Rule, applied to it for a period of three years preceding harvest."

Organic livestock regulations state, "Livestock...on a certified organic farm, and the products of such livestock...shall have been under organic management from birth or hatching..."

"We have been working with the organic industry in Utah for some time now, and believe we have created standards that will protect the consumer and give organic growers the tool they need to develop their industry," said Dick Wilson, director of Plant Industry.

The UDAF has set an October 2, 2000, deadline for implementing the new rules. Other hearings are scheduled for later this year.

If you wish to receive a copy of the Proposed Utah Organic Certification Standards call Emilee Bradley at (801) 538-7185.

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Biotech And Agriculture Focus Of Annual Report

The role of biotechnology in American agriculture is the central theme of the department's annual report, due to be released July 1. The report will be published along with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Statistics Service report which traditionally includes the latest data about agricultural production in the state.

Commissioner Cary G. Peterson's annual message emphasizes that there are some benefits associated with improving plant and animal genetics. The commissioner also emphasizes the need for highly productive and prime quality agricultural land.

"I would like us to remember that while technology is a major contributor to our lives, it can't replace a sustainable supply of food, water or fertile soil."

*Commissioner of Agriculture
and Food, Cary G. Peterson*

Annual Report Highlights

Responding to an insect infestation, working to open new business opportunities for Utah meat processors, hosting multinational trade talks, and completing a reign as one of the nation's top agricultural leaders were a few of the accomplishments of Utah Commissioner of Agriculture and Food, Cary G. Peterson.

Commissioner Peterson completed his one-year term as President of the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture in September. As president, he worked to ease trade restrictions and open new markets for U.S. farmers and ranchers.

"It was an important year for agriculture and its leaders," said Commissioner Peterson. "From the challenges presented by natural disaster to the earth-shaking

threats posed by worldwide economics, 1999 was a year that required state commissioners, secretaries and directors to accelerate our involvement," Peterson added.

The following are highlights of recent actions taken by Commissioner Peterson:

With assistance from Plant Industry Division Director, Dick Wilson, declared an insect emergency to obtain legislative funding to fight the 18 county infestation that spread to nearly 1.5 million acres.

Worked with Utah's Congressional Delegation to draft legislation allowing state-inspected meat and poultry products to be shipped across state and international borders. Supported legislation that would give Utah processing plants access to new business markets.

As a primary member of the State's Quality Growth Commission assisted in the identification and preservation of open space and critical resource lands.

Earmarked more than \$200,000 of the Critical Agricultural Land Conservation Fund for farmland protection projects. When the funds are used to purchase conservation easements, sometime in mid 2000, they will be some of the first public funds spent to protect critical agricultural lands.

Signed a request for federal disaster assistance following drought conditions in several Southern Utah counties. Also sought federal assistance following the collapse of a major irrigation canal in Weber County.

Assisted Utah Hay Growers in moving excess alfalfa and other hay to drought-stricken eastern states.

Under the direction of State Veterinarian, Dr. Michael R. Marshall, sponsored a first-of-its-kind symposium in the West on spongiform encephalopathies.



(left) Outgoing President of the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA), Commissioner Peterson, congratulates President-Elect, Fred Dailey from Ohio during NASDA's annual meeting in September.

Information on diseases such as scrapie, bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE or mad cow disease), and chronic wasting disease (CWD), was offered to veterinarians, federal, state, and local agency representatives as well as others.

Transition completed in January of 2000, to the HACCP inspection program statewide. Nearly 50 meat and poultry processing plants under the new HACCP regulations. HACCP, or Hazard Analysis and Critical



The Department of Agriculture and Food addressed three significant issues during the past year: Africanized honeybee, Mormon crickets and grasshoppers and drought.



(above) European honey bees are attracted to a fire truck during an African bee safety demonstration in St. George. Emergency crews learned how to cope with the bees in anticipation of their migration to Utah in the future. (left) Mormon crickets and grasshoppers infested about 1.5 million

acres, causing hundreds of thousands of dollars in damage to farmers and homeowners. (below) Governor Leavitt and Commissioner Peterson conducted a news conference about emergency assistance for farmers following an irrigation canal break in Weber County.

Control Point allows plant owners to customize their food safety/inspection programs while government monitors the process. Retired: Deputy Commissioner of Agriculture and Food, Van Burgess retired in August of 1999, ending a 31 year career with the state of Utah.

